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Wartości autoteliczne w kulturze symbolicznej.

Na przykładzie indyjsko-polskich spotkań literackich

[Autotelic Values in Symbolic Culture

as Exemplified by Indo-Polish Literary Encounters]

by Renata Czekalska, Księgarnia Akademicka,

Kraków 2013 (*Societas*, 75), 287 pp.

An understanding of culture as human activity directly related to values is well-rooted in the European thought at least since 19th century. It reaches back to Immanuel Kant and his view that art and science saturate humans with culture and that between ethics and culture there is an immediate dependence. The Neokantians Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert attempted a definition of culture in which values are considered to be inherent in all human endeavours, products and processes. What more, the Neokantians formed an idea that all human activities are determined by norms resulting from values which are intrinsic to the particular fields in which they operate and are seen as predominant. Therefore human world is constituted by the value of the true – inherent to science, of the beautiful – belonging to art, and of the good related to the sphere of ethics. This world differs from nature in that, that it is the world of values.

The view that it is only through symbols, images or signs (in a wide sense of the word “sign”) that values can be read and interpreted in any given culture became highly influential in 20th century. Ernst Cassirer, the originator of the philosophy of symbolic forms, claimed that man most essentially is an “animal symbolicum,” who interposes systems of signs between himself and the world, perceives it through its representations and has no immediate access to it. Unceasingly creating, superimposing and analysing symbolic senses in his world, man enters, as if, in a constant dialogue with himself, making the world meaningful to himself by himself.

The main title of the book by Renata Czekalska reads: “Autotelic Values in Symbolic Culture.” It brings direct and immediate associations with the above sketched

tradition of interpreting cultural activities of man as an interdependent net of relations between ideals and values, meanings and norms, all of which create the symbolic dimension of culture and, indeed, the symbolic dimension of the world man lives in. Specific methodological frame for her research Czekalska found in the work of a contemporary Polish sociologist Antonina Kłoskowska, whose propensity for Kantian, Neokantian, structural and semiotics approaches to culture is, indeed, amply substantiated in her writings. Kłoskowska's idea of symbolic culture and the concept of a syntagma of national culture were particularly seminal for Czekalska's analyses, though throughout her book one can see inspirations drawn from other eminent Polish scholars. Czekalska investigates the rich literary material she uses in the book along the lines of the Polish school of structuralism, and particularly the structural conception of literary communication developed by Michał Głowiński in his *Style odbioru* [Styles of Reception]. The cultural communication theories of Andrzej Mencwel, Józef Koźielecki or Leszek Korporowicz are also distinctly present in the book. Yet, in the spirit of intercultural dialogue, the examination of autotelic values in symbolic culture, as exemplified by the Indo-Polish literary encounters, is also discussed in the context of theories developed by indigenous Indian theoreticians, both ancient and modern. Czekalska refers to their ideas with an unbiased seriousness, which, unfortunately, is still not a commonplace in academic writings, especially beyond the field of Oriental Studies.

The main body of "Autotelic Values..." consists of five chapters, preceded with an introduction (pp. 9-10) in which the author explains the purpose of her work, that is a conceptual analysis and synthetic description of the process in which components of the genetically foreign culture reveal their culture-formative dimension in the target culture.

It needs to be emphasized here that in the book only those of artistic activities, which relate to the axiological criterion (mainly autotelic values) of the symbolic culture are studied. Secondly, much importance is given to the bi-directionality – though not symmetricalness, as the case studies show – of this culture-formative process.

The first chapter, "Theoretical Aspects of Symbolic Communication" (pp. 13-34) Czekalska devotes to outlining the speculative and methodological foundations of her work, which she based on Kłoskowska's theory of symbolic culture. In its synthesis, Czekalska points out that symbolic culture is determined, on the one hand, by two co-occurring criteria: semantic and axiological; and on the other, by two value-oriented categories: instrumental and autotelic. Yet the autotelic, namely self-oriented or having itself as an aim, dimension of symbolic culture (necessarily the most individual of human activities, which finds its best expression in art) does not exclude a social dimension. By including others in the mutual/social/intercultural system of exchange of autotelic (artistic) values, symbolic culture displays its paradoxical nature. Kłoskowska argues that culture is communication itself and therefore any symbolic phenomenon becomes a message which is both a sign and a value restored anew and revived in the act of decoding it by others. The basic nature of symbolic culture finds its best expression in interaction.

This brief outline of the theory of symbolic culture by Kłoskowska is necessary here insofar as it is within its general theoretical frame that Czekalska researches into the

multi-dimensional and many-levelled exchange of autotelic values between the Polish and Indian cultures. Regardless critical evaluation of Kłoskowska's theory – such as a relatively strong idealisation of the subject of theoretical enquiry, which in itself is an unavoidable outcome of employing the semiotic-structural method or a Kantian and Neokantian idiographic approach – one needs to emphasize here that Czekalska's application of the method is flawless throughout the book.

Chapter two (pp. 39-85) probes into "Polish-Indian Analogies and Relations" and their function in the process of intercultural communication. One can find here an interesting, even if short, sub-chapter (six pages), in which there are shown historical parallelisms between India and Poland. The chapter also offers a wealth of data on intercultural relations – in different spheres of life – between the two countries. Remaining sub-chapters here discuss, among others, the presence of Indian religious and philosophical views in Polish humanities in the period between 19th and 20th century; Indian literary inspirations to be found in Polish opera; the presence of Polish refugees in India during the second World War, Indian inspirations in the 20th century Polish poetry as well as Polish motifs to be found in the works of contemporary Indian poets.

Third chapter (pp. 87-120) explores the theoretical question of how foreign literature inscribes in the syntagma-model of a given national literature. That theoretical matter is the ground for investigating the reception of English literature in India as well as Indian literature in Poland in the 19th century. One asks why in the study of Indo-Polish literary encounters there is included a section on reception of William Shakespeare? Czekalska explains that the matter under discussion is exemplified with English literature in order to symmetrically present the phenomenon of the reception of foreign literatures in a target literature. In that period Polish literature was not yet known in India. However, this interesting subject of the translations (adaptations, indianizations, indigenizations) of Shakespeare's plays into Indian languages is presented here in a rather cursory manner and certainly does not do justice to the manifold and often ideology-determined implications of the reception of Shakespeare's works in the British India. The sub-section of the chapter is titled 'Shakespeare as a tool in the British colonising policy,' but for an indication that the dramatist's works were an important element of English-language educational policy of the British towards the Indians, there is no direct reference to the fact that they were also instrumental for the implementation of the European imperialistic and Eurocentric cultural politics in India. Also, Shakespeare's reception via the translations into Indian languages could have been greatly impeded by the illegibility of their cultural context for the Indian audience and incompatibility with the Indian cultural norms and values. All these elements certainly played a role in how Shakespeare was received in colonial India. It is to be regretted that the subject of how foreign (here: English) literature inscribes in the syntagma-model of a given national (here: Indian) literature, in this particular chapter did not receive the attention it certainly deserves.

It is in the fourth chapter, 'Towards Universalisation. Translations of works of literature as manifestations of participation in a genetically different culture' (pp. 125-

-161) that Czekalska turns to the main subject of her book and focuses on case studies which are to substantiate her argumentation. Her attention is drawn to the popularizing and translational activities in Poland and in India from the beginning of 20th century, through the Post-Second World War period, up to the present time. Separate sub-chapters describe translations made from Indian languages into Polish by Antoni Lange (pp. 127-131), Stanisław Schayer (pp. 132-136) and by Zdzisław Reszelewski: from Polish into Indian languages and from Indian languages into Polish (pp. 150-152). The following and last chapter, "Special Instances of Cultural Participation – Examples of Receiving a Literary Work in the Style of Aesthetization" is the fifth and the last one (pp. 163-237). It is followed by conclusive summary (pp. 243-252). The book has three separate back-of-the-book indexes which include names of people (pp. 271-276), titles of works (pp. 277-282) and selected concepts (pp. 283-284). The index of concepts is indeed, very scanty, considering the scale and the differentiated dimensions of the inter-, trans- and cross-cultural interactions between Poland and India, which were researched and described in the book.

The English Summary is of slightly more than two-pages length (pp. 285-287) and does not go much beyond a very general overview of the content of the book. Its introductory part is written in a hermetic jargon which does not facilitate understanding the main thesis of the book. I note this with regret, because the book deserves more than this near-to-cursory description in English.

To summarize – the part of chapter five (pp. 174-231), where the author searches for and documents the presence of autotelic values in texts chosen for her case-studies, supports the main thesis of the book in the most evident and substantial manner. The poem *Pururawa and Urwasi* by Bolesław Leśmian is read as an example of a literary universalisation of a Vedic myth. Next it is amply proven that contemporary Polish poets (T. Różewicz, Z. Herbert, Cz. Miłosz and W. Szyborska), due to their presence in India via translations and readings by poets of the Hindi language, perform similar functions in Indian culture as they do in Polish culture. Further Czekalska introduces the reader into the musical universalisation Rabindranath Thakur's poetic texts in the works of Polish composers such as K. Szymanowski, G. Bacewicz or M. Stachowski. Lastly, the reader gets acquainted with the process of universalization of Kabir's works in Polish culture, with a fundamental role of translations of his works by Cz. Miłosz. It is here, in the case-studies, that critical abilities of the author, supported by a balanced application of textual and cultural studies methods, provide readers with best documented and therefore most convincing conclusions. It is also at the juncture of literary criticism and cultural studies, where philological competence of Czekalska becomes most noticeable, provided that one understands philology not narrowly as "love of word," but wider and more justly as "understanding the world through word."

"Autotelic Values in Symbolic Culture as Exemplified by Indo-Polish Literary Encounters" is a book which contains rich and well documented history of Indo-Polish encounters, particularly in the sphere of art. This is shown in a wider historical, socio-political and cultural perspective. The main value of the book, however, consists in the affirmative interpretation of civilizational encounters, as opposed to the confronta-

tional one which is too strongly present in our times. On the example of both Indo-Polish encounters and, indeed, in her own methodological approach, Czekalska showed that meeting “the Other” in an open and non-prejudiced manner can become an occasion for an enriching dialogue of senses, values and ideas and exemplify the idea of a global cultural ecumene postulated by Ulf Hannerz.

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